CRITICAL DIGEST

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The Weekly That Keeps You Informed Of The Current Broadway Critical Scene

Quick Glance at N.Y. New Shows -- full digests on inside pages.

Twelfth Night-Empire, 10/3/49. Times, Eagle, Newark News, Journal of Commerce, Morning Telegraph and Variety welcomed the first legitimate show of the season with "Pro" reviews. But the other daily critics termed the revival as "undistinguished", if not downright boring. There was a vast difference of opinion on who, if anybody, won individual acting honors.

Yes M'Lord-Booth, 10/4/49. Herald Tribune, News, Compass, Post, Sun, World Telegram, Newark News, Wall Street Journal and Morning Telegraph greeted A.E. Matthews and the new English comedy. The others, including the Times, didn't think Matthews' contribution was enough for a full evening's entertainment. Many of the critics mentioned the refurbished theatre; Chapman giving it a "Pro" review.

The Mikado-Hellinger, 10/4/49. The first G&S production of the limited four weeks series received mild "so-so" reviews. Most of the critics seemed happy that anyone was willing to spend money producing G&S, and they didn't want to do anything to discourage the producer. Freedley, Morning Telegraph, termed the portrayal of the lead as the worst and most vulgar performance of the part he has ever witnessed.

N.Y. Openings This Week

The Browning Version-Coronet. 10/12/49. Boston's daily critics predict the Evans twin bill will be a Broadway hit. Edna Best drew top honors with Evans in the acting department. Author Rattigan also received praise. But Billboard's Riley doubted if the play would join the smash hit division. He saw it merely as an enjoyable actor's holiday.

Touch And Go-Broadhurst, 10/13/49. New Haven's trade press critics didn't think much of Abbott's latest revue. But "FRJ", New Haven Journal Courier, thought all of the sketches and songs were along the lines that are bound to please Broadway audiences. Philadelphia's daily critics were more lenient. Murdock, Philadelphia Inquirer, thought the first half of the show was ready for Broadway, but he said that the second part needed reworking. He considered this a factor that could be easily remedied in a thoroughly entertaining show.

N.Y. Closings This Week

Anne Of The Thousand Days-Opened 12/8/48. Closed 10/8/49. The critics cast 18 "Pro" votes for the Anderson Play. "Con" votes were recorded by the Daily Worker, George Jean Nathan, Commonweal, Cue, Nation and New Republic. The two latter voted against it because the play didn't stick to the text. The Daily Worker classed it as an average historical novel.

N.Y.C. Criticism At A Glance -- see page 899 -- Cumulative Index Issued Monthly

Copyright 1949 by T.M. Kraus, Editor, 505 Fifth Avenue, N.Y.C. 17, N.Y. $10 Yearly

Twelfth Night

a. Times-Pro: Light, joyous performance. Cowl's 1930 show was more neatly stitched together, lines more beautifully spoken; but this ranks next for daintiness, charm and good humor. Moss gives best Malvolio of our time. Reid's Viola is cunning and beguiling, Foch's Olivia is ravishingly beautiful.-Atkinson.

b. Tribune-Con: Spirited revival with pace and balanced acting, all the worst features of the classic are clearly discernible. Carl Reid's Belch is robust characterization, Moss plays with exaggerated emphasis, Foch more comely than assured. Twelfth Night has a dying fall.-Barnes.

c. News-Con: Nice enough, some nice people in it, but I'd say the season is yet to open. Had blasphemous notion that Shakespeare wrote play as script for a Berle TV show, with Berle playing all parts, delivering all gags. Moss performance shade too desperately funny, Townes does nice job as clown. A set-up for Berle.-Chapman.

d. Mirror-Con: Interesting, but uninspired. Chekhov and Straight's Litchfield Conn version was best of recent years. Present show needs Charles Coburn as Sir Toby, Bobby Clark as Sir Andrew, and Groucho Marx as Malvolio. Reid miscast as Viola. If Hayes and Evans couldn't sell show to N.Y., doubt if present group can.-Coleman.

e. Compass-Con: Solemn purpose of director and actors seems to have been to create delights out of a pretty, polite, but general, lethargy. A little vigor would have been better. Good looking array of actors, young people who have studied Shakespeare well, who would pass their examinations nicely enough without coming out anywhere near head of cast. All of acting seems labored.-Pollock.

f. Post--So-So: By no means brilliant or exciting, but it is good looking, well spoken, offers several attractive, if not outstanding performances. Moss can speak lines with beauty, distinction, but not quite as impressively as I had hoped. Foch plays with warmth, charm. Modestly pleasant version of minor play.-Watts.

g. Sun--So-So: Never actually irksome, but it never achieves any real distinction. Foch gives best performance of evening, Moss gets some comical effects into swaggerings and lamentations of Malvolio, didn't find Carl Reid uproarious. Show doesn't let you down, but it seldom impresses you. Routine revival that fairly shrieks for the best acting in the land.-Morehouse.

h. Journal-American-Con: Better read than heard. Found it on the dull side, didn't care if I never see it again. Show better than 1940 version. Take it easy at Empire, if you take it any way at all. Reid is good, Moss gets more out of Malvolio than is in him, Townes makes his motley almost merry.-Garland.

i. World-Telegram-Con: Production pretty to look at, but lacks energy, gesture, style. Vagaries of direction prove distracting. Carl Reid brought more conviction, understanding to readings than anyone else, Foch so dazzling to watch may not remember a great deal about what she said.-Hawkins.

j. Eagle-Pro: Production all to the good, at no time did it confuse the audience. Strictly professional production. Wonder what play 348 years old can still amuse a first night audience. The jokes are corn.-Currie.

k. Newark News-Pro: Pleasant, though undistinguished. Seemed legitimate start in right direction for season. Performed nicely enough with traditional authenticity. Moss exceedingly droll, Reid charming. Carl Reid costume makes him look like overstuffed Daniel Boone.-Field.

Twelfth Night

a. Women Wear Daily--So-So: Heartily recommended only to Shakespearian devotees who would favor this type of classical clowning. Certain segments catch heartiness lustiness of author's intent. Players catch spirit of japeries. Moss is excellent. If all scenes as jovial as those animated by bibulous knights, play would be much merrier than it is.-Dash.

b. Wall Street Journal--So-So: Cheering in that it broke the play drought and provided a reminder that stage still exists. Marked by Moss' fine performance and smooth, pleasant production. Rest described best as amiable, without distinction.-Cooke.

c. Journal of Commerce-Pro: Actors obviously enjoyed what they are doing, their enjoyment found way across the footlights. Nobody bothered too much about language and diction, which gave the performance freshness, life and gayety.-Single.

d. Morning Telegraph-Pro: A gay offering of Shakespeare at his airiest, a spirited, amiable and funny play pacing its players through a series of comic adventures. Direction is sometimes too stiff. Reid's Viola everything you could ask for, Moss most often acceptable but at curious moments faltering.-Bolton.

e. Variety-Pro: Lively, tasteful production with several nice performances. Pleasant theatre, but appears to lack sufficient vitality for Broadway. Moss excellent, Reid fine, Townes passable as Clown. Promising start to season. Takes right direction in low box office prices.-Hobe.

Yes, M'Lord

f. Times-Con: London has sent us a trifling comedy that probably seems even more trifling in N.Y. Matthews can make scanty material look witty. He deserves to be on Tory payroll as Exhibit A in affable public relations. Author hardly taken trouble to write anything brisker than languid parlor charade. Even with Matthews in cast, someone has to do some work on a comedy offered in public.-Atkinson.

g. Tribune-Pro: Matthews returned triumphantly, keeps play buoyant, engaging on every occasion he holds center of stage. Comedy is highly specialized, it has flimsy construction. Play is thin and jolly British, but it has Matthews.-Barnes.

h. News-Pro: Offers great deal in sly, dry humor, but not geared to high speed demanded by American audiences. Nice thing, good for warm, affectionate chuckles. Had pleasant time after gave up trying to understand every British word. Booth comfortable now, fine new decorations, comfortable new seats and a new center aisle.-Chapman.

i. Mirror-Con: Slight, unpretentious little comedy, at best when it is satiric, at worst when it jumbles a few romances before reaching what is known as a happy ending. At best when Matthews and Curzon hold stage and fort. Wish they come back in play worthy of their talents. Has much to recommend it, but not sufficient.-Coleman.

j. Compass-Pro: Likeable little thing, pleasing collection of leisurely drolleries about dislocation of classes in England. Matthews always a delight to watch and to listen to. Fine cast of almost mute but smiling people.-Pollock.

Yes, M'Lord

a. Post-Pro: Welcome import, first good, intelligent fun of season. Play not sturdy or distinguished, inclined to be ramshackle in structure, slender in narrative, occasionally lethargic in its movements. Matthews provides as delightful a performance as likely to see this season. Stritch is believable as American girl, but too hearty in manner, could have been better.-Watts.

b. Sun-Pro: Slack, placid comedy, gabby, leisurely, which is so well played by attractive English cast it provides rather entertaining evening. Matthews sure, expert in playing, curt and deft with clipped speech, master of timing. Not example of superior playwrighting, but facile performance makes it frequently funny.-Morehouse.

c. Journal-American--Con: Slim and Albionian. Because of Matthews it is amusing. In spite of Matthews it gets slimmer, more Albionian as evening wanes. I'm an ardent Matthews fan and cherish him as greatest living pick-up-a-line-and-throw-it-away-comedian. If show is success here, I'll be surprised and happy.-Garland.

d. World-Telegram--Pro: Attentive listening not only rewarding at this British play, but it is also no effort, because play progresses at amiably casual rate. Humor for Americans may lie in its sarcasm. Matthews acting memorable, wonder how he seems to do so little, accomplish so much.-Hawkins.

e. Eagle--So-So: Witty and humorous, but not profound. Some sharp lines, often comic in their satire. Good acting, one stayed to bitter end to find out how play would end. But it ended on a minor chord.-Currie.

f. Newark News-Pro: Chucklesome, entertaining, though extremely British. Matthews acts deliciously. Well acted with uncommon adroitness by all English cast. Skillfully directed. Should be grateful to Shuberts for bringing play over.-Field.

g. Wall Street Journal-Pro: Competent and continually amusing performances. As a play don't amount to much, but that shortcoming is kept pretty well out of earshot. Matthews is master of the running misapprehension. Good example of light comedy playing, hope more evenings as engaging.-Cooke.

h. Women Wear Daily--So-So: Prime virtue is bringing Matthews back. Amusing in desultory fashion. One can readily understand why English were regaled by its antics. One can just as readily understand why Americans may not cotton to it.-Dash.

i. Morning Telegraph-Pro: Matthews bears full package, does bright, cheery job of keeping a frail, English comedy going. Makes stage glow, gives it warmth, sense, charm. When he's not on stage, play fairly amusing, it may stay awhile.-Bolton.

j. Journal of Commerce-Pro: Script no great shakes as play. Matthews though is asset to outweigh plot deficiency. Amiable, sly, little comedy.-Single.

The Mikado

k. Times--So-So: Uneven job. He understands G&S intended their work to be both satire of day, as well as spoofing of Japan, but he still must capture the intangible quality that will give it sparkle, unity needed. Show has plenty of bounce, gaiety and energy but lacks style and polish. Riggs fine as Ko-Ko.-Fumke.

The Mikado

a. Herald Tribune--So-So: Little better than mediocre, but it is pleasant to have in town. Company has not magic of voice and timing, but it is attractive -- a professional group. Miss certain light-hearted brilliance that creates perfect diction in seemingly effortless manner.-Guernsey.

b. News-Pro: Pleasant enough performance, cast brings production rigid authority required. Chorus well rehearsed, though group patterns dull. Orchestra good. Director does clean, traditional job. Never put D'Oyly Carte out of business.-Watt.

c. Mirror-Pro: Salute producer for spending money on his production. Made an auspicious start in forming troupe. One of best choruses heard for long while. Deserves support for launching new company.-Coleman.

d. Compass--So-So: Ambitious, stylish production, but completely lacks oomph. Group work fine, but when on his own each performer has individual manner. Orchestra thoroughly professional.-Elias.

e. Post-Con: Lacks style, pace. Only few cast members indicate have any acting ability. Revival lumbered and dragged, coming to life only at odd and too infrequent intervals. Engel instilled in musician and chorus precise style missing from the performers. Makes Masque and Lyre group seem much better than I originally thought.-Rice.

f. Journal-American--Pro: After company settled down and pulled self together, no reason why their Mikado shouldn't be relished by all free thinking Savoy-ards. Enjoyed wholeheartedly their Gilbert-and-Sullivan-ing. Doings are alive and clicking, without any precious English accent.-Garland.

g. World-Telegram--Pro: Sounded and looked good. Musically the rendering was capital. Nothing was overplayed, everyone in cast primed in this mood. If you like well behaved Mikado without harsh clowning, show is a safe bet.-Biancoli.

h. Women Wear Daily-Pro: Colorful reproduction of classic. Expert Savoy-ards form cast. Though time dulled some of keen edge of Gilbert jokes, Sullivan's score is still beautiful and fresh. For the great band of G&S rooters, this is better news than a Yankee-Dodger World Series.-D.H.

i. Wall Street Journal--So-So: Enjoyable and promising performance. Is a tinge of greeness evidenced in cast. The company may develop with a few weeks work. Some of the individual performances are excellent, but they spark intermittently.-T.W.

j. Morning Telegraph-Con: Strictly second rate revival. Never saw anyone as bad in title role as Joseph McCauley. Such a display of vulgarity was singularly unfortunate. But the audience howled at the Mikado's antics.-Freedley.

k. Sun-Con: New company's principals are weak, and efforts at comedy are doleful. Mikado without sprightliness, without buoyancy and comedy values, without style. Perhaps other shows will be better. They have to be.-Morehouse.

NOTE: Reviewers are rated as to how they like the show, not if they think it will be a hit. "Pro" means the reviewer recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. "Con" means he doesn't recommend it as such. "So-So" means the reviewer didn't state his preference directly.

N.Y.C. Criticism At A Glance - Ratings of 30 Reviewers - See Index for Digests.

A Streetcar Named Desire-Barrymore, 12/3/47. Pro: Times, Tribune, News, Mirror, PM, Post, Sun, Journal-American, World-Telegram, Brooklyn Eagle, Newark News, Women Wear Daily, Wall Street Journal, Journal of Commerce, Morning Telegram, Variety, Billboard, Theatre Arts, Commonweal, SRL, Cue, Newsweek, Nation, New Republic, New Yorker. Con: Daily Worker, Catholic World, Christian Science Monitor. So-So: George Jean Nathan, Time.

As The Girls Go-Broadway, 11/14/48. Pro: 19 reviews. Con: Tribune, Star, Morning Telegram, Commonweal. So-So: News, World-Telegram, Theatre Arts, Commonweal, Daily Worker, Christian Science Monitor. No review in Saturday Review.

Blackouts-Ziegfield, 9/8/39. Pro: News, Mirror, Journal-American, World-Telegram, Women Wear Daily, Billboard. Con: Times, Tribune, Post, Sun, Variety, Compass, Theatre Arts, Christian Science Monitor, Newsweek, Time, New Yorker. Others unchecked.

Born Yesterday-Miller, 2/4/46. All 30 reviewers vote "Pro".

Death of A Salesman-Morosco, 2/10/49. Pro: 28 reviews. Con: Nation. So-So: Time.

Detective Story-Hudson, 3/23/49. Pro: 20 reviews. Unchecked reviews are Eagle Newark News, Daily Worker, Nathan, Catholic World, Christian Science Monitor, Saturday Review. Nation, New Republic, Compass.

Diamond Lil-Plymouth, 3/23/49. 30 Reviews for Mae, 30 against her play.

Goodbye My Fancy-Beck, 11/17/48. Pro: 18 Reviews. Con: World-Telegram, Daily Worker, Wall Street Journal, Catholic World, Nation, New Republic. So-So: Nathan, Cue, SRL, Time. No review in Compass, Christian Science Monitor.

Kiss Me, Kate-Century, 12/31/48. Pro: 28 Reviews. Con: New Republic. None in Nation.

Lend An Ear-Shubert, 12/16/48. Pro: 25 reviews. Con: Daily Worker, N.Y. Star, New Republic. So-So: Nation. None in SRL.

Miss Liberty-Imperial, 7/15/49. Pro: Mirror, Sun, Journal-American, Women Wear Daily, Morning Telegram, Billboard. Con: Times, Tribune, Variety, Theatre Arts, Commonweal, Cue, SRL, Time, New Republic. So-So: News, Post, World-Telegram, Newsweek, Catholic World. Other unchecked.

Mister Roberts-Alvin, 2/13/48. Pro: 23 reviews. Con: Schristian Science Monitor. So-So: Daily Worker, Nathan, Morning Telegram. No review in Catholic World, Nation.

South Pacific-Majestic, 4/8/49. Pro: Times, Tribune, News, Mirror, Post, Sun, Journal American, World Telegram, Women Wear Daily, Journal of Commerce, Morning Telegram, Variety, Billboard, Theatre Arts, Christian Science Monitor, SRL, Newsweek New Yorker. So-So: Cue, Time. Others unchecked.

The Madwoman of Chaillot-Royale, 12/28/48. Pro: 20 Reviews. Con: Mirror, Star, Sun, Journal American, Journal of Commerce, Nation, Billboard, Nation. So-So: World Telegram, Eagle.

Where's Charley-St.James, 10/11/48. Pro: 16 reviews. Con: Post, Sun, Women Wear, Daily Worker, Billboard, Commonweal, Christian Science Monitor, SRL, Newsweek. So-So: Mirror, Time. None in Nation. Eagle unchecked.